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WIZARD WORLD
ROCK 2019

In these exclusive interviews, **GENE SIMMONS** and **PAUL STANLEY** discuss Kiss' **END OF THE ROAD** tour and the long, long journey they've taken together to get to this point. They also talk about former **KISS** guitarists Ace Frehley, Vinnie Vincent and Bruce Kulick — and whether any or all of them might show up for one last hurrah

THE

LONG

KISS[®]

GOODBYE

BY **RICHARD BIENSTOCK**
PHOTOS BY **JEN ROSENSTEIN**

[from left]
Tommy Thayer,
Gene Simmons,
Eric Singer and
Paul Stanley,
photographed
in Van Nuys,
California,
October 17, 2018

"IT'S A CELEBRATION,"

Paul Stanley says, when asked what fans can expect to witness on Kiss' End of the Road tour. And whether or not you're a tried-and-true member of the Kiss Army, one thing that can be agreed upon is there's certainly plenty for Kiss to be celebrating. The band, always with co-founders and main songwriters Stanley (guitar, vocals) and Gene Simmons (bass, vocals) at the helm, have experienced incredible highs and more than a few lows in the 45 years since the release of their self-titled debut album. But one thing that has never wavered is their commitment to delivering a show worthy of four guys who call themselves the "Hottest Band in the World."

"The RIAA tells us we have more gold records than any American group, in any category, in history," Simmons tells *Guitar World* with his characteristic bluster. "I could give a fuck, by the way. The only thing that means anything to me is you get up onstage and people love what you do. The rest is just blah, blah, blah."

That commitment to the live experience is largely the reason the band—which these days also includes guitarist Tommy Thayer and drummer Eric Singer—is calling the End of the Road

tour their final outing. "You want to go out on top," Simmons says.

And as Paul and Gene explain in the following interviews, when they say "final," they mean it. "It's one of those great occasions where you know what's coming next," Stanley says. "You get to cherish the moment, knowing that the moment will pass. You hear so many times people say, 'I wish I had known...' Well, this is a chance for all of us to have that one last hurrah together, because we know that's it. And there's nothing bittersweet about it. It's all just sweet."

Guitar World recently sat down separately with Stanley and Simmons ("often when we do interviews together, there's not enough oxygen in the room," Gene explains) to discuss the End of the Road tour and the long journey they've taken together to get to this point. In addition, the two talked about the various members who have been in and out of Kiss over the years—including guitarists Ace Frehley, Vinnie Vincent and Bruce Kulick—and whether any or all of them might show up for this last "hurrah"; the particulars of their long-lasting relationship; and just what they'll be up to after the curtain finally closes on Kiss.

Until then, expect to find them out on the road doing what they've done, arguably better than anyone, for close to half a century.

"You come to see Kiss, you walk in through those gates and it's electric church," Simmons says. "You know, glory Hallelujah. All hail rock 'n' roll."



Gene Simmons
with one of
his ubiquitous
custom GS Axe
basses

GENE SIMMONS

A lot of bands embark on farewell tours, only to come back out a few years later and pick up right where they left off. How do we know this is really it for Kiss?

I understand, I understand. People might not believe it. But let's just call it for what it is — it's the *final tour*. Because you want to go out on top. I'm 69. Still strong. Still look good. Still have hair on my head... although I have a lot more on my back now. But by the time this tour finishes I'll be 72. So if I was in the Stones or U2 I could run around onstage in sneakers and a T-shirt and never break a sweat. And both those bands are great. But Kiss is a different animal — we're like heavy artillery. We're armored. I wear eight-inch platform heels and it takes hours to put on the makeup and the studs and all the stuff, and then I fly through the air with no net, shoot fire out of my ass, Paul flies off at the stage wearing 40 pounds of armor... We all love Jagger and Bono, but if they put in the amount of work we put in, they'd drop dead in a half hour.

Lazy guys.

I love them to death and respect those guys. But all they have to do is sing.

Kiss has always been celebrated for its live show. But do you feel you've gotten your due as a songwriter or a musician? I don't care. Means nothing to me. ASCAP gave myself and Paul the songwriters medal of honor, whatever that's called [the ASCAP Founders Award]. It means nothing.

The only thing that means anything, that includes boxers or baseball players or anybody, is when you get up to bat or when you get in the ring and your bosses are standing on their seats. And, by the way, that's our job. We're not political. We don't talk about the secret of life because we don't have a clue what it is. Our job is to make you forget the traffic jam, the fact that your girlfriend is elbowing you because you're looking at that girl over there with the set of double D's, all that other stuff that tortures everybody. With Kiss, it's magic time.

Your relationship with Paul Stanley goes back almost half a century...

I've known him longer than anyone...other than my mother.

Well, there you go. Had you not met Paul all those years ago, where would Gene Simmons be right now?

Where would I be? Nowhere. Because there is something called chemistry. Although it's fair to say Paul and I are completely different people. But we're two different sides of the same coin. I don't have any brothers or sisters on my mother's side. But certainly Paul would be the brother I never had. And we constantly disagree about all sorts of things, but we share the important values that make great relationships last a lifetime. Love of family. Don't abandon your kids. Show up on time. Do the work. Be gracious. Have a work ethic. Do all that stuff. And if you're lucky, goddammit, and if you're blessed to have the right thing at the right place at the right time, then you're

even more lucky if you find somebody else you can work with. Because if Jagger has an off night, the Stones aren't so good. But if I have an off night, I know Paul's going to push it through to the goal. Same as when he has an off night. And don't kid yourself — Tommy and Eric often give us good kicks in the pants, too.

You bring up chemistry. It's no secret that fans are hoping to see the original Kiss lineup, with Ace and Peter, reunite somehow, somewhere, on this tour.

Well, let me address that. You know, in life, mother nature is nonjudgmental. Whether you're a baby and have never experienced life or whether you're old and grey and have gone through the trials and tribulations, both of you, when you put your hand into the fire, get burned equally. So life doesn't give you three chances. You get one chance. But Ace and Peter have gotten three chances. They were in and out of the band — fired — three times. For drugs, alcohol, bad behavior, being unprofessional... all the clichés are clichés. Even suicide is overrated. It's been done many times. So the only reason Ace and Peter were let go the first time, and then the second time and then the third time, is that they weren't carrying their load. You can't be in a car with two flat tires. It's not going to go anywhere. It's your responsibility to change the fucking tires so that the whole car doesn't stop. It's nothing personal. Because remember — being in a band is a gift. You hardly work. Physically, anyway. So the short answer to your question



Is we'd love to have Ace and Peter join us here and there. And if they don't, it's not going to be because of us. But they're never going to be in Kiss again.

That's pretty definitive.

Three times is the charm. "I promise I'll pull out" doesn't work. It's the boy who cried wolf: "Oh, I've been straight for a million years." Terrific! Have a good life! Would we welcome Ace or Peter to jump up onstage for a song or two? Of course. Could we depend on either Ace or Peter to do a full set night after night? Not on your fucking life.

On that note, Vinnie Vincent recently resurfaced following decades out of the public eye. You played a short acoustic set with him in Nashville earlier in 2018. Any chance he could be welcomed back into the Kiss fold?

Listen, there's personal and there's business. It's worth stating that Vinnie has sued the band and lost 14 times. I'm not here to cast any aspersions. He's a talented guy. That's why he was in the band. But would I depend on him to get up onstage and do anything? Never.

What about having him come up on stage and play, say, "Lick It Up"?

No. Never. Never happen. No. How many times do you want to get sued before you say that's enough?

So he's a guy that wouldn't even necessarily be welcomed as a guest at one of the End of the Road shows.

Can he come to the shows? Of course! Anybody can. But onstage? Never.

I'd imagine we might see Bruce Kulick up there.

We love Bruce. Bruce and Ace were on the Kiss Cruise and they both came up and jammed a few songs with us and all that stuff. And Bruce never did anything wrong. He was always professional and showed up on time. But, you know, times changed and we decided to do what was right for the band [Kulick's tenure in Kiss ended when the band reunited with Frehley and Criss in the mid Nineties]. So I can never say anything bad about Bruce. Total professional.



Great guitar player. Just a real stand-up guy. I would call him a friend.

Okay, so it sounds like there's a possibility of seeing Ace and Bruce up onstage at some point.

You know, we're gonna find out a lot of stuff. But we're not doing anything thinking. How do we sell tickets? Because the tour's already sold out. But people will say whatever they want to say, and think whatever they want to think, and that's okay. Social media is, you know, the garbage fill of all time, where everybody, whether they're qualified or not, can say whatever they want and then it either catches fire or not. I know somebody very close to me who believes the moon is hollow and the aliens are inside. And you may be able to guess who that is.

Vinnie Vincent?

No, but you're close. [laughs]

To finish up, let's look a few years into the future. Kiss has just played the final show on the End of the Road tour. What does Gene Simmons do when he wakes up the next day?

Well, I have nine other businesses that take up my time, including my music festival, Titans of Rock, which launches this August in Grand Forks, North Dakota. We'll have, oh, I don't know, 40,000 or 50,000 people. And we have 20 shows lined up. Then I have real estate, I have restaurants... I think I'll be busy.

Will you miss Kiss?

Oh, of course. Are you kidding? When we started this thing — and it's really important to give Ace and Peter credit along with Paul and me — we didn't know shit. We were the four most unqualified bums off the streets of New York. I don't know, they call it a singularity in signs, but it just happened. Without managers, without marketing, without anybody. We're not One Direction without Simon Cowell. We ain't the Monkees. We were just four guys in a rat-infested fire trap of a loft. We really did it ourselves. The honesty, integrity and authenticity of Kiss, it came from our hearts. And that's great. So I don't know what will happen in the future, but Kiss will not tour anymore, I can tell you that. But I'll always be known as that guy with that tongue. And that's okay. Who wouldn't want that?



THE SHORT ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION IS WE'D LOVE TO HAVE ACE AND PETER JOIN US HERE AND THERE.

And if they don't, it's not going to be because of us. But they're never going to be in KISS AGAIN!

Paul Stanley with his signature-model guitar, the Ibanez PS10

PAUL STANLEY

A lot of bands embark on farewell tours...and then come back a few years later to do it again. How do we know this is really it for Kiss?

Well, our age for starters. [laughs] Obviously there are people who are cynical, but those people are cynical to begin with. And yes, we did a farewell tour 19 years ago, but to qualify that, the circumstances were so different. It was short-sighted and it wasn't too long after we finished with it we realized we didn't want to say farewell to Kiss, we wanted to say farewell to the two people [Ace Frehley and Peter Criss] who had become a ball and chain on Kiss. So to do this now, we're doing it for the total opposite reasons. The band gets on great. Everybody's having a great time. Everybody enjoys each other's company. We sound great. With that said, we're also aware this doesn't become easier as time goes on. For us to maintain what we do at the level we do it, it's finite. There's an expiration date.

Kiss has always been lauded for its live show. Do you ever crave that same recognition for your own songwriting or guitar playing?

I don't crave anything I don't have. The people who choose not to see what should be fairly apparent are choosing not to see it. So I have no wishes for accolades. My track record speaks for itself. Let me put it this way: the people who understand us see the totality, and the people who don't, don't. Life's too short to waste your time trying to make converts of people who don't like

you. It's barely long enough to spend time with the ones who do.

As a songwriter, was there a first Kiss song, or even a pre-Kiss song, that you wrote that made you feel, "I can do this"?

Well, some of my pre-Kiss songs became Kiss songs. So that says something. "Firehouse" was written when I was in high school. "Let Me Know" was written before Kiss. So I had a very clear understanding of what I wanted to do and what I thought made a great songwriter and great songwriting. And I was a huge fan of songwriters. I was a fan of everything that was coming out of the Brill Building — Carole King and Gerry Goffin, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry, Neil Sedaka. You had all these amazing songwriters who were schooled in how to do this, how to have a good song with a verse and a chorus and a bridge. There's a structure that goes beyond just rambling. That's why the chorus is called a hook. I have always tried to adhere to that, and write songs that, by the time you hear the second verse, you can sing the second chorus.

What would you say are your strengths as a guitarist?

I think that I've always managed to be the foundation and the core of what we build together. For example, in the past when we've tried cutting a basic track without me, once I put my guitar on we usually find out that we have to recut it. Because there's a swing to what I do. So I'm a big believer

in the absolute necessity of a great rhythm guitar to not only hold this kind of music together, but to propel it forward. And propelling it forward doesn't necessarily mean being ahead of it. A great rhythm guitarist basically leans on the drums. You're closer to being on the backbeat than you are to being in front of it.

What's your main setup onstage for the End of the Road tour?

I'm a dedicated Ibanez PS10 user [Stanley's signature model]. That guitar, with a few diversions for different reasons along my history, has been my guitar of choice. I certainly collected a lot of vintage guitars at one point, and my PS10 was spec'd on some of those guitars. So it really is a classic guitar in many senses. In fact, if you were to put it into someone's hands and they weren't looking at it and just went basically on feel and sound, they would perhaps think it was a different guitar by a different company.

As for amps, I've been using Engl for quite a while and I've had great success with them. They do some amps that aren't really my taste, that sound more like a jackhammer [laughs]. But they also build some really classic, well-refined tube amps. Mine have been fine-tuned to how I like them, and in the best way hearken to the sound of bands that I've loved over the years. So my guitar and my amp are rooted in the classics. Whether or not they are the actual classics they're rooted in is moot.

You've known Gene almost half a century.



Had you not met him, would you have been able to accomplish everything that you have?

I can't imagine having accomplished a fraction of what I've accomplished without Gene. It was clear to me early on that we should be together in spite of whatever differences there are in our personalities. And let me also say that Gene — perhaps because of his personality and a desire to incite emotions in people — has really not gotten the accolades that he deserves as a bass player. The fact that he plays what he plays and sings at the same time, and that the roots of his playing are so classic — it's like Ron Wood when he was with Jeff Beck, or Paul McCartney or Jack Bruce or Felix Pappalardi — he's just a terrific bass player. And when he puts his mind to it he's a terrific songwriter. So I'm well aware that what we created and built together could never have been done by either of us alone. And the older we get, I think the more we covet and cherish that.

Fans have been speculating about the possibility of a reunion of the guys that started Kiss alongside you and Gene on this final tour. What are the chances we'll see Ace and Peter get up onstage with you at some point?

It's really not up to me. But I'll say that this is a celebration of this band and its accomplishments and its history. So anybody who was short-sighted enough to think this should be a reunion is missing the point. That being said, I would love to see everybody at one point or another be onstage. And if that doesn't happen, it's their choice, not mine.

If you're talking about everybody, does that include former guitarists like Bruce Kulick and Vinnie Vincent?

Well, Bruce's band played on the Kiss Kruise [the band's festival at sea], and they were phenomenal. I was listening to some of the Eighties and Nineties Kiss songs that he did live and frankly it made me very proud. He did a terrific job. So Bruce is somebody who shouldn't be overlooked or underestimated as far as his role in this band. Now Vinnie, that's one exception, and for so many reasons. I would say that's not someone who I want to celebrate.



You've talked about having an expanded setlist on this tour, but you've also been adamant about the fact that you don't feel there's room to include obscurities in the show. That said, are there any Kiss deep cuts out there that you would love to play, even if you won't actually get around to doing them?

There really aren't, quite honestly. There are songs from my first solo album [1978's *Paul Stanley*] and those got taken care of on my solo tour for *Live to Win* [Stanley's 2006 solo album]. And last year on the Kruise we played "Wouldn't You Like to Know Me?" [from *Paul Stanley*] But I think the public has it right. I think the songs that are the most popular are the ones that *should* be the most popular. And to appease or satisfy a really minute handful of people in an 18,000-seat arena, we'll leave 17,990 people going, "What was that?" So what we want to do is celebrate all the eras of the band, and there's enough songs — whether you go from "Firehouse" to "Black Diamond," "Heaven's on Fire" to "Hell or Hallelujah," "Psycho Circus" to "C'mon and Love Me" — that are well known that to take up space in the show to play something that nobody

knows is just beyond me. I mean, I remember going to see the Stones once at the Wiltern in L.A., and they did a whole night of rarities. It was pretty damn boring.

Let's look a few years into the future. Kiss just played the final show on the End of the Road tour. What does Paul Stanley do when he wakes up the next day?

More. The idea that I would ever retire, that's kind of like retiring from life. I'm not Yoda, but let me tell ya, if you don't wake up every day excited at the prospects of what the day has to offer, you're either depressed and should see somebody about that, or you're not living. So what am I going to do? What I do now. I paint. I'll probably write some songs. Maybe go in the studio and do an album. Spend time with my family. The only thing I won't be doing is touring.

Will you miss Kiss?

I am Kiss! And I mean that in the best way. I consider Kiss my band. And I do think and hope everybody else in the band feels the same. It's a big part of who I am and who I always will be. So I don't see missing Kiss, because Kiss is always here with me.

CC

I don't see
missing Kiss,
because
**KISS IS
ALWAYS
HERE
WITH
ME"**

OUTTA

THIS

WORLD

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK
PHOTO BY JEN ROSENSTEIN

Guitarist **TOMMY THAYER** reflects on the surreal experience of going from **KISS** fan to **SPACEMAN** to the **END OF THE ROAD**

WHEN PAUL STANLEY and Gene Simmons pull off their platform heels for the final time, they'll have been at the helm of Kiss for almost 50 years — an amazing experience, to be sure. But what might be an even more amazing experience? To be in the space boots of Tommy Thayer, who grew up in 1970s Oregon worshipping Kiss, only to eventually find himself a fully costumed, full-fledged member of the band.

"It is almost cooler in a way," Thayer says with a laugh. "Because I've come full circle. As a kid I used to look at their photos in the pages of *Circus* magazine, like, 'Here's this incredible band with cool hair and makeup and outfits and stacks of Marshalls and pyro...' I was blown away, just like everybody else at the time. And now, decades later, here I am."

Thayer's path, of course, was not a straight shot from the bedroom to the Kiss stage. He first rose to prominence as the guitarist in Eighties hard rock act Black 'N Blue, who opened for Kiss on tour and for whom Simmons produced a pair of albums. Post-Black 'N Blue, Thayer also performed as Ace Frehley in a Kiss tribute act, Cold Gin. He was brought into the Kiss organization in an administrative capacity in the mid-Nineties and assumed the role of the Spaceman in 2002 after Ace Frehley parted ways with the band following their reunion.

When it comes to straddling the line between staying true to Frehley's original sound and style and injecting some of his own unique guitar voice into the band, Thayer, whose primary guitar and amp setup on the End of the Road tour will be a Les Paul through his Hughes & Kettner Tommy Thayer DuoTone heads, says, "That's always been a little bit of a trick. But my guitar style has always been very much in line with the classic original Kiss style, because I think Ace and I came from the same school of those late-Sixties, early-Seventies English hard rock blues players like Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck and Ritchie Blackmore. So it came very naturally to me to play that early Kiss stuff true to the way it was written and recorded."

As for what songs he most enjoys playing? " 'Black Diamond' would be an obvious one, because there's a lot of guitar interludes and solos," Thayer says. " 'Let Me Go,

Rock 'n' Roll' is great, too, and 'God Gave Rock 'N' Roll to You II' has some very signature melodic lines which are a lot of fun. But honestly, I get off on playing all of them."

As for how he feels about possibly playing alongside Frehley or Eighties-era guitarist Bruce Kulick, were they to show up as surprise guests on this final run? "I think if it happens kind of organically, it would be great," Thayer says.

The guitarist is also sympathetic — to a point, at least — toward the rigid stance some longtime fans have about seeing anyone but Frehley wearing the iconic Spaceman makeup. "I've been a fan for longer than probably most of these people, so I understand," he says. "But you can't expect things to be exactly how they were 40 years ago. That's a fantasy. So I don't let it bother me. I'm comfortable and confident with where I am and what I do."

What's he's doing right now, of course, is helping Kiss celebrate a four-decade-plus rock 'n' roll legacy.

"This is 45 years of a phenomenon, really," Thayer says. "And I'm just honored to be a part of it." And he promises that, with the End of the Road tour, "we're going to do it bigger and better than we ever have. Kiss aims to go out with a huge bang — figuratively and literally." 